



# FIA Matters!

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Submit stories by e-mail to [FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov)

## Today's big story

### A mother's pain and local office support

By Patricia Weaver, Community Resource Coordinator  
Branch-Hillsdale Family Independence Agency

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"We are blessed to have you in our corner, spreading so much heartfelt love and compassion to us." Those words of appreciation were written for Branch-Hillsdale County FIA staff that contributed \$1,500 gift to the family of friend and coworker **Carolyn Rosario**, a family independence manager in Branch County.

Carolyn will never forget January 19, 2002 when she received news from Seattle, Wash. of her son Dominic Rosario's injuries during a routine exercise of Karate, a sport at which he had won numerous trophies. Dominic suffered a broken neck with vertebra split in places that left him mostly paralyzed. Carolyn was on the next plane to the Northwest accompanied by her fears, her faith, and the hopes and prayers of the many FIA employee friends whose hearts went out to her in sympathy and support.



**Carolyn Rosario with granddaughter Janessa; Dominic & Jessie Rosario.**

For an agonizing time, Carolyn's daughter-in-law Jessica and grandchildren DJ (age 12) and Janessa (7) didn't know if Dominic would survive the tragic accident. Later, when faced with the reality of a serious spinal cord injury, the family had to deal with a new way of life that revolved around hospitals, medication, care-giving, and rehabilitation. For Carolyn, who was 2,000 miles away in Michigan, it was a time of extreme worry and hurt. But as she said, in the positive manner those co-workers recognize so well, "I still have him."

In the two years since the accident, Dominic has made a lot of improvement. He's able to feed himself, to use a cell phone and computer. He provides more self-care, has gained mobility and is less dependent upon the myriad of medications that once kept him alive. Things are looking up and the family is now eager for July to arrive, when they will move from Seattle to Augusta, Ga. to be closer to friends and family. Though still a distance from Michigan, Georgia is a much easier travel destination for Carolyn. She looks forward to spending more time with Dominic, Jessica, DJ, and Janessa.

Branch-Hillsdale FIA staff have been behind Carolyn throughout the two-year ordeal. In November 2003 everyone agreed that, rather than buying holiday gifts for each other, they would make contributions to help Dominic, who still has many extra medical expenses including the need for a specially equipped \$6,000 bed. The \$1,500 that was collected was given to Carolyn in a gold star shaped box and she sent it to Seattle in plenty of time for a wonderful surprise Christmas present for her son and his family. Carolyn was very touched by the thoughtfulness and generosity of her coworkers who she describes as "extended family members."

## CPS heroes



**Ian Tschirhart**



**Ken Schroeder**



**Kim Willis**



**Susan Ramirez**

Five FIA staff members received "Children's Protective Services Hero" awards from the Family Independence Agency April 20. The five children's protective services specialists were honored for good work, teamwork and providing quality customer service during a ceremony April 20 in Lansing.

They are **Susan Ramirez** of Kent County, **Kenneth Schroeder** of Barry County, **Diane Soto** of Kent County, **Ian Tschirhart** of Wayne County CFS North Central District, and **Kim Willis** of Branch County.

The "CPS Heroes" is part of the Family Independence Agency Employee Recognition Program.

Winners were nominated by supervisors and were selected for their leadership in the community, demonstrated excellence at work and extraordinary service to families.

A link to the program that includes information on the winners will be available on FIA-Net under "Employee Information".

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## Berrien's "human blue ribbon" for Child Abuse Prevention Month

By Jerry Frank, Director  
Berrien County FIA, Benton Harbor  
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April 16 was an amazing day in Berrien County! More than 150 people including Berrien County FIA employees stood together between Noon and 1 PM in the Benton Harbor City Center that day.

The focus of this first time event, organized by the Capstone Family Center, was the formation of a Human Blue Ribbon in recognition of Child Abuse Awareness month. Our goal was to represent a visible symbol to demonstrate we care about strengthening families and wish to end the pervasive problems of child abuse and neglect.



The Capstone Family Center plays a vital role in providing various prevention services for Berrien County families. Representatives of human services agencies, law enforcement, prosecutor's office, elected officials, other concerned and committed citizens participated in the human ribbon as well as the following Berrien County FIA employees: **Nancy Obstfeld, Debbie Reaume, Kim Celmer, Michelle Kuiken, Jerry Frank, Heidi de la Foret, Michelle Souders, Beverly Lucas, Tennille Slavens, Donald Perrin, Brianne Van Hekken, Paula Laquerre**, and **Marion Maier**.

## Family member returns home from Iraq

From Becki Jo Brooks  
Manistee County Family Independence Agency, Manistee  
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I wanted to share with all of you my brother's homecoming at the airport in Grand Rapids April 17. It was so awesome. My brother is SSG Jerome Roebuck (we call him Jer). There were two news stations there - WOOD TV 8 and FOX TV 17, both of Grand Rapids. We had the waiting area packed full of families, friends and others from the original unit with red, white and blue balloons, flags and banners.



**Becki Brooks' brother Jerome Roebuck (together at left) was the subject of a welcome home ceremony in Grand Rapids April 17. Roebuck was returning from military duty in Iraq. Becky is a general office assistant with Manistee County FIA.**

When the first three soldiers came down the ramp everyone started screaming, waving flags and holding up signs. My brother was the fourth person to walk down the ramp. My niece, Jessi (Jer's daughter), was the first to give him a hug. Then we all took turns.

After the reception at the airport, a bunch of us gathered at a restaurant where Jer and his buddy Jason made a very moving speech thanking everyone for support and the welcome home. Altogether there were 30-40 troops who came home from the Muskegon Army Reserve Unit - 180th TC. "They were lucky," my brother said. "There were only two other flights (after his) before the military put a stop to the soldiers coming home."

Jer left Michigan in February 2003 with members of his unit and went onto New Jersey before leaving for Iraq in March 2003. Their unit supported the 4th infantry with duties including fuel delivery and guard duty.

Jer can be called up for duty again as soon as October 2004; his unit in Muskegon is currently on stand-by. While he was away, staff members from my office in Manistee County contributed to packages I sent for him and other members of his unit. We sent about a package a month. We are having a welcome home party for them June 5.





## Kick It Up for Kids

From James G. Criste, Adoption Specialist  
Lenawee County Family Independence Agency, Adrian  
[CristeJ@michigan.gov](mailto:CristeJ@michigan.gov)

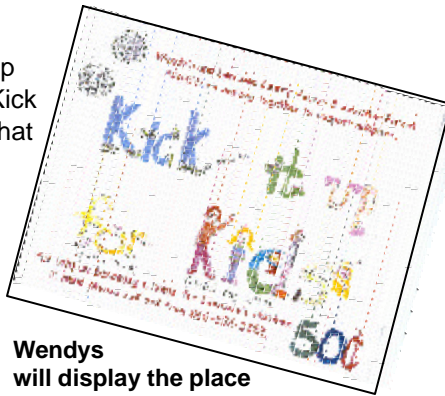
People dining in Lenawee County during May can help support adoption through Kick It Up For Kids, a program that raises money to support adoptive families.

For the second year, Wendy's of Lenawee County will be running this program May 2-22 in collaboration with the Lenawee Family Independence Agency. In the program, customers are asked to add 50 cents to their food order as a contribution to adoption services.

All money raised in this program is used to directly support adoptive families in Lenawee County. Some money is used to help families meet the material needs of adding children to the family. Some of the money is used to provide supportive programs for adoptive families.

Lenawee County Foster and Adoptive Parent Association – also known as LCFAPA – manages the money raised in this program. No wages or program management costs are paid from these funds. All adoptive parents in Lenawee County are eligible for membership in LCFAPA.

The program raised \$3,600 last year, exceeding our goal by more than \$1,000. We would like to raise \$4,000 this year. We will do this, in part, by asking various community organizations to sponsor a day by asking their membership to go to Wendy's on their day and “kick it up.”



**Wendys will display the place mat during the campaign. The graphic was created by a Lenawee County foster child. The phone number rings to Jim Criste's desk.**

## Managing negative people

**New web course for supervisors, managers, and directors**  
From Janet Waterstradt, Office of Professional Development  
[WaterstradtJ@michigan.gov](mailto:WaterstradtJ@michigan.gov)

A negative outlook on life and persistent negative emotions reduce productivity and morale and increase absenteeism and use of medical benefits. People that are predominantly negative create stress for themselves and everyone with whom they work and alienate customers and partners. **Managing Negative People** is a web-based course for supervisors, managers, and directors. The course teaches how to neutralize negativity, channel energy in a constructive direction, and create a positive workplace culture. You can access the course anytime at <http://performance-architect.mfia.state.mi.us/resourceTools/SearchResources.asp?ResourceType=1&ResourceCategory=43> Click on “more info” next to the course name. It will take you about one hour to complete the course.

## Making it work in Kalamazoo

Information: Sherry Thomas-Cloud, Director  
Kalamazoo County FIA, Kalamazoo  
[ThomasCloudS@michigan.gov](mailto:ThomasCloudS@michigan.gov)

The Kalamazoo County FIA is involved in a local collaboration called “Making it Work”. The project was developed by John Dillworth, president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Southwestern Michigan, Ellen Kisinger-Rothi, executive director of Housing Resources, Inc., and Sherry Thomas-Cloud, director of Kalamazoo County FIA, and is carried out by the three agencies.

In 2001 the agencies began to combine resources to have a greater impact on customers struggling to maintain affordable housing, buy groceries and maintain their families with low-wage jobs. The pilot served 120 participant families in its first two years. Through the initiative 63 percent of these households retained stable housing and earnings for extended periods. This is compared to 30-40 percent using the traditional model. The program partners feel the success shows increased stability for customers compared to what each agency can do individually.

As part of the cooperative, each agency assigns specific staff to work on the project. Each agency provides funding and they conduct joint case management sessions with the customers. The Kalamazoo County FIA has provided Housing Resources Inc. and Goodwill Industries office space so that customers just have one place to come to get the services. The customer can also access a variety of other services from the individual agencies besides the “Making it Work” program. The boards of directors of all of the agencies note the importance of having the blended funding and case management to make this initiative succeed for their mutual customers.

## Walking for more than a cause

From Joi C. Greene, Family Independence Specialist  
Wayne County FIA Hamtramck District, Detroit  
[GreeneJ3@michigan.gov](mailto:GreeneJ3@michigan.gov)

On June 20, 2001, my grandmother died from complications from coronary heart disease. Since then, June 20 has been an emotional day for me. This June 20, I will participate in the American Stroke Association Marathon where I have pledged to walk 26 miles and raise the minimum of \$4,900. I am asking for your assistance to help me fulfill my pledge. By making a donation, you will aid in the research, education and treatment of strokes for its victims and their families. All donations are tax-deductible. If you choose to make a donation, please contact me at (313) 872-1450. Your support is greatly appreciated. For more information on strokes please visit [www.strokeassociation.org](http://www.strokeassociation.org)



**Joi C. Greene**

**Your letters,  
intercepted  
and otherwise**

**Date:** April 19  
**To:** FIA Matters!  
**Subj:** Missing persons

For the FIA Matters! newsletter I suggest that, at each printing, a picture of a missing child or adult be posted in the newsletter. With our jobs at FIA, we meet so many new customers daily, some who seemed to have drifted in from nowhere, who are homeless, or suffering from mental illness. These people often don't know the town they are currently in, no less where they came from. Then there are possibilities of recognizing a missing child...the scenarios are limitless and we never know who or what we may encounter from day to day in this job.

**Dawn Marie VanNieuwenhze**, Eligibility Specialist  
Chippewa County FIA, Sault Ste. Marie

■ The FIA maintains a database of "AWOL" foster children at [www.mfia.state.mi.us/awol/](http://www.mfia.state.mi.us/awol/)

**Date:** April 1  
**To:** Robin Brand, Family Independence Manager  
Muskegon County FIA, Muskegon  
**Subj:** Yvonne Bialik

I wanted to write to you about one of your caseworkers, Yvonne Bialik. I know you always get complaints about some of your workers, but I wanted to let you know what a great person you have working for you. She is such a nice person and has a great sense of humor when a person needs it. Also, she explains everything on my level if I don't understand it the first time. She shows a lot of patience toward (me) while explaining things if I don't qualify for it. Yvonne is the best person I have ever had help me. Again, she's the best.

**Patricia Russell**

Muskegon

■ Yvonne Bialik is an eligibility specialist with Muskegon County FIA in Muskegon.

### Submitting customer letters for publication

Customer letters praising employees are very popular with other employees. To submit a customer letter for publication:

1. Ensure your supervisor knows about this and approves.
2. Have the customer sign **Consent for Publication** form, which is downloadable from the MS Word template as form **0199.dot**. Customer approval is required in order to avoid violating case confidentiality.
3. Send the letter and a copy of the signed consent form by fax to (517) 373-8471. Keep the original in the case file.
4. Include the letter writer's hometown and the job classification(s) of the employee(s) cited in the letter.
5. Thanks!

**Date:** March 24  
**To:** Barbara Madison, District Manager  
Wayne County Fullerton District, Detroit  
**Subj:** Tina Seals

I am writing to inform you that the good work the (Family Resource Center at Stewart Elementary School) is doing a very good job helping me. I volunteer at my children's school. I am a single parent of three children and I receive SSI. I have very little money for my household of four but we make do. The FIA worker, Ms. T. Seals, has been very supportive of me and my family. She (has) been providing me with her time and clothing (help). She has also work(ed) with me to get dental work assistance. Ms. Seals went as far as calling different dental school(s) for researching the possibility of me getting a partial plate for my missing teeth. She also assisted me getting a bed for my son. I have never experienced the care and concern that I am receiving with Ms. Seals. I believe the Family Resource Center is a great asset to the community, especially if all the workers are like Ms. Seals.

**Alice Johnson**

Detroit

■ Tina Seals is a family independence specialist with the Wayne County Fullerton District office and works in the Family Resource Center in Stewart Elementary School in Detroit.

FIA Matters! is a product of Michigan's Family Independence Agency  
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Larry VanDeSande, editor Submit stories by e-mail to: [FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov](mailto:FIA-Newsletter@michigan.gov)